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ABSTRACT

This speech reports a systematic attempt at a cooperative curriculum evaluation in northwestern Indiana involving 56,000 students, 2,500 teachers, and approximately 900 administrators in the Indiana suburban area of Chicago. The major objective was to systematically train and use classroom teachers and administrators to operationalize a curriculum evaluation model. The data would indicate that competent professionals can be trained to play an effective role, their training can be utilized as an inservice component of an overall evaluation, and that this cadre can provide a population of proprietorial professionals to deal with the final evaluation reports. (Author)

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COOPERATIVE CURRICULUM EVALUATION:

APPLICATION OF A THEORETICAL CURRICULUM EVALUATION MODEL

A PAPER

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APPLICATION OF A THEORETICAL CURRICULUM EVALUATION MODEL

The emphasis placed on accountability for public education has in recent years heightened the awareness of many educators to the void inherent in the traditional concept of educational evaluation. Past evaluative efforts, although offering numerous attempts to compare the academic proficiency of individual students to national norms, have provided limited information which school personnel could use as a basis for wise educational decision-making. To eliminate this void, it is imperative that educators and educational researchers direct their efforts to developing flexible evaluative models capable of providing accurate data (Stufflebeam, 1968).

The Northwest Indiana Curriculum Evaluation Project was studied to analyze the process by which a theoretical model of curriculum evaluation was applied. Attention was accorded to the techniques which were used and the impact which resulted from training and engaging public school educators as data collectors in a large cooperative curriculum evaluation venture encompassing eleven school corporations containing 56,141 students and 2,580 teachers.

Although cooperative educational programs have received previous recognition, cooperative ventures for the evaluation of curriculum have remained virtually unexamined. The purposes of this paper are to present a description of the techniques comprising the Northwest Indiana Curriculum Evaluation Project, and to summarize findings pertinent to the in-service education potential inherent in the model.

Background of Cooperative Project

In the early months of 1970, some members of the Northwest Indiana Public School Study Council expressed concern about the collective and independent impact which their schools had upon the students they served. The Council, which consisted of sixteen school corporations in Lake and Porter Counties in northwestern Indiana, invited Drs. James McElhinney and Richard Kunkel, professors in the area of Curriculum and Instruction at Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, to meet with them to conduct a workshop in program evaluation and discuss a plan for evaluating the programs of the individual schools in the Council.

McElhinney and Kunkel suggested that a model for curriculum evaluation which they and their colleagues at Ball State had developed and field-tested might be adapted to collect the information which the Council sought. In 1963-64, a model had been developed and used to evaluate several school systems in the Midwest. In 1967, and again in 1969, the model was used as a basis for determining the distinct purposes and activities needed to successfully alter the existing curriculum in member schools of the East Central Indiana School Study Council under P. L. 8910 ESEA, Title III. The population for these studies consisted of thirteen school districts operating in 100 school buildings, employing more than 110 administrators, 1,100 teachers, and serving more than 30,000 pupils (Kunkel, Lucas, McElhinney, 1970).

A similar study conducted in the Rockford, Illinois, School District (1970) was used to provide the professional staff with an accurate description of the educational status of 19 participating elementary schools. The data, once collected and organized, were used by the staff as a basis for planning in-service activities.

Following an active discussion of the model and its prior utility, a steering committee was appointed to consult with McElhinney and Kunkel in developing a proposal by which such a study might be conducted for the Northwest Indiana Public School Study Council. In mid-August, 1970, the proposal was ratified and the project begun.

A Theoretical Model of Curriculum Evaluation

In an unpublished paper entitled "A Rationale for the Evaluation of Curriculum", McElhinney and Kunkel define their theory of curriculum evaluation as being based on two major assumptions. One assumption is that education is what pupils perceive as happening to them because they attend school. This includes experiences in classrooms, hallways, activity programs, libraries, guidance and administrative offices, and playgrounds.

The other assumption is that education is what teachers and other school personnel do that influence pupils. This includes the planning that is done, the materials and activities that are used, and the pupil behaviors that are rewarded and punished. According to McElhinney and Kunkel, one major task of program evaluation consists of obtaining an accurate description of these two components in the programs to be evaluated.

To obtain this description, three data collection methods from behavioral science research are used. Structured interviews are conducted with a sampling of students and with the entire population of teachers and other professional personnel. In addition, questionnaires are administered to all teachers and to all students in grades 4-12. In the primary grades (K-3), classroom observations followed by a small group interview (usually two students from each

room) are used in place of individual student questionnaires. This departure occurs because many items in the questionnaires can not be read and understood by primary pupils.

Interviews require each respondent to construct his own responses and allow the interviewer to pursue a topic. Thus, interviews provide depth to an evaluation. The questionnaires provide breadth by permitting the total population to respond and by permitting the use of many more items. The classroom observations are used to collect additional information in kindergarten through third grade where interview and questionnaire techniques produce limited data. The combination of these data collection techniques, using parallel items, enhance the accuracy of the description of the teaching-learning experiences in a given school building.

Once the data are collected and organized, the findings are summarized and submitted as individual reports for each building evaluated. Included in the individual building summations are: reporting of responses received, implications of the findings, and the subsequent recommendations. Judgments of the outside evaluators are offered in the final sections of the reports and are clearly identified as judgments. The original questionnaire data are presented so that the school corporation can examine the original data and make its own value judgments.

Method of Study

The data utilized in the study of this evaluation model were obtained from two sources. The first of these was participant observation. The participant observer served as the director of the Northwest Indiana Curriculum Evaluation Project, and recorded observations of significant activities and events which occurred. These observations were supplemented by numerous Project publications and communications, and solicited information and feedback from other participants who were involved in the Project.

The second major source of data was a questionnaire which was administered to those who served as team leaders for the task forces which collected data in each of the seventy-six participating buildings.

Initially, two hundred persons participated in the two training sessions for the Project. During these sessions, Ball State doctoral fellows who understood the total evaluation process to be used were asked to circulate through the training sessions and identify those persons who:

1. were positive about the project as a process for improving curriculum in his or her school building and/or district,
2. possessed a comprehensive grasp of the process and techniques necessary to accurate data collection.

At the close of each workshop, the doctoral fellows submitted to the project director the names of persons who met the stated criteria. The director then contacted the specified individuals to determine whether they were willing to assume a leadership role. Twenty of the twenty-one persons identified in the workshops accepted this responsibility and were officially designated as team leaders.

Although additional team leaders were added later, this study confined itself to assessing the views of those team leaders who met the following qualifications:

1. The team leader was identified through the selection process cited above;
2. The team leader was present for the entirety of one of the two training session workshops.

Training Workshops for Data Collectors

The two training workshops for data collectors followed an identical format. During the first evening session, the data collectors were informed of Project objectives, the role each participant was to play during the Project, and the rationale for the curriculum model.

At the conclusion of this first evening session, questionnaires were distributed to all participants to determine anonymously each individual's level of comprehension of the material which had been presented. The consultant, the director, and those Ball State doctoral fellows who were included in that particular workshop met to discuss the questionnaire responses and to devise ways of successfully dealing with those comments which were negative. The items were then discussed with the entire workshop group at the beginning of Session II the following morning.

The first session of the second day was concerned with presenting the techniques, skills, and procedures needed to administer the observation instrument to be used in the primary grades (K-3). During this session each item included in the instrument was examined by the group for clarity and applicability to schools with the Northwest Indiana Public School Study Council. Following this session, the participants were sent into actual elementary classrooms where they were able to apply the instrument and, thus, develop a degree of competence in its use. In the first workshop which was held in a high school, a teaching film was used to simulate an elementary classroom. All participants received an opportunity to practice with the observation instrument prior to actual data collection.

The afternoon session was concerned with student and teacher interview guides. In this session, the consultant familiarized the participants with interview guides and enlisted their assistance in revising the items. Then participants were assigned students with whom they practiced interviewing techniques.

A total of eight interview guides were used in the Northwest Indiana Curriculum Evaluation Project. These consisted of a specialized instrument for Primary Students (K-3), Intermediate Students (4-6), Secondary Students (7-12), Elementary Teachers and Secondary Teachers, Elementary Principals, Secondary Principals, and Guidance Personnel.

Considerable effort was exerted upon the participants to convince them that their superintendents had nominated them to assume a leadership role in the program. Similarly, emphasis was placed on the fact that the participants would be trained data collectors at the conclusion of the workshops. Each would possess an understanding of the rationale of curriculum evaluation upon which the model was based, as well as possessing the expertise with the mechanical practices necessary to effectively collect interview and observation data.

The dinner meeting which followed each workshop included a short after-dinner speech delivered by one of the Council administrators who had been instrumental in originating the project. In the address, the need for commitment to the Project was stressed. Participants were urged to return to their individual buildings and communicate the aims, objectives, and procedures of the Project to fellow teachers and administrators. At the completion of the evaluation, participants were urged to assume a leadership role in identifying and examining undesirable traits or characteristics which were identified in their particular building and/or school corporation.

At the conclusion of the training sessions, most workshop participants were visibly enthusiastic about the Project. A few in attendance initially exhibited attitudes of skepticism concerning the Project's potential significance and/or hostility toward outsiders (the Project staff) who dared to penetrate the privacy of the classroom teachers. By the time the sessions were concluded, the participants still in attendance were overwhelmingly supportive of the Project's continuance and were equally eager to be a part of it.

Many factors seemingly contributed to the success of the workshops. An overt effort was extended to involve participants in such matters as revising instruments and planning how to conduct the remainder of the Project's activities. In addition, the awareness of the concern publicly expressed by the Council superintendents and their subsequent willingness to finance and support the Project evidently corresponded closely with the unmet professional needs of the participants. Once merged, this concerned awareness of chief administrators and their professional employees attained a level of commitment which creates a favorable atmosphere for the evaluation project.

In the judgment of the participant observer, the data collectors who were nominated to attend the training workshops were faced with three alternatives: (1) they could take on a leadership role in the project; (2) they could reject the entire endeavor as a

waste of time and withdraw from further participation; or (3) they could pay lip-service to the project and keep personal opinions secret. Judging from the extremely high espirit de corps which developed during the training sessions and continued throughout the remainder of the Project, it was quite obvious that the majority of the data collectors embraced the leadership role.

The only negative comment received during this phase of the Project was concerned with the balance of participants (classroom teachers vs. administrators). The respondent in question expressed the opinion that too many administrators had been enlisted as data collectors. Actual count of the participants at each training session indicated that the two groups were equally represented.

Major Findings and Conclusions

Based on data collected through participant observation and through questionnaires which were administered to team leaders who led data collecting teams in the Northwest Indiana Curriculum Evaluation Project, the following conclusions have been drawn:

1. The theoretical model of curriculum evaluation devised by Kunkel and McElhinney can serve as an effective vehicle with which to collect data and accurately describe the facets of the teaching-learning situations of a given school building.

   Responses garnered from the team leader questionnaire generally indicated a positive regard for the evaluative model and its instrumentation. Concerning whether the data accumulated from the various schools visited was accurate, 60% of the team leaders responded favorably, 30% expressed neutrality and the remaining 10% had negative perceptions.

   In regard to the instrumentation which was used, the team leaders perceived the items as being both effective due to the quality of the items included and appropriate to the population surveyed. In addition, the team leaders indicated that they recognized a need for systematically collecting accurate data upon which to base curricular decision making, and saw the model as fulfilling this need.

2. Public school personnel can be trained to serve effectively as data collectors within the McElhinney-Kunkel model for curriculum evaluation.

   Following the training sessions, numerous data collectors corresponded with the project director. In

one case, a participant included four pages of typewritten notes citing the cognitive information she had gained from attending the training sessions. In the accompanying note, she stated that the Project was progressing in her school system prior to the time that the actual data-gathering activities had commenced and wished the Project staff well in its Project responsibilities.

In addition, 80% of all the team leaders responding to the questionnaire felt that the training workshops had imbued them and their colleagues with the skills necessary for effective data collecting. (The remainder were uncertain.) Also, the teams leaders indicated that the training workshops were

- -directed at the matter at hand
- -informative (regarding the historical perspective of the project and the rational of the model).

3. Communication will play a vital role in determining the success or failure of a curriculum evaluation project.

A significant number of the problems which were encountered during the course of the project can be traced directly to the lack of adequate communication within the evaluation model. Even though various communiques explaining the purpose of the training workshops were dispersed to the participating superintendents and building principals, 25% of those team leaders attending the training sessions had received no prior information. Similarly, correspondence received from data collectors during the Interview and Observation phase of the project cited a need for a project coordinator to be present in each building during the site visitation. As perceived by the data collectors, the coordinator's role would be to answer the technical questions which confronted the data-collecting team, to provide a channel of communication between the project staff and the data-collecting team, and to serve as a knowledgeable arbitrator if the team leader and building principal disagreed as to the process necessary to effectively complete the data collection.

4. A cadre of professionals holding a propriatorial relationship to the project enhances the possibility of a curriculum evaluation being utilized for further program development and decision making.

Although somewhat concerned that the evaluation would not cause significant change in their respective

schools, 85% of the team leaders felt an obligation to provide leadership to foster appropriate curricular change based on the findings growing out of the Project. The remaining 15% had not yet decided what future role they perceived themselves as playing. In addition, 40% expressed a desire to instigate a follow-up study to determine the accuracy of the Project findings. Once this task has been completed, 60% recognize a need to create system-wide in-service programs to address the identified areas of concern, 30% were uncertain as to what steps should be taken, and 10% would like to direct change efforts at the individual building level.

5. An effective model for program evaluation and potential for future in-service rests in the two populations and their involvement, one being the school undergoing the study, and the other being those persons who were trained to systematically gather the data.

Responses received from the team leader questionnaire would suggest that the in-service impact derived from involvement in a curriculum evaluation process has significant affect upon the attitudes, values, and insights of its participants. The team leaders perceive the following as resulting indirectly from their participation in the Project:

a. New insight to curriculum evaluation (80%)
b. Altered perceptions of teachers in general (30%)
c. Altered perceptions of students in general (30%)
d. Increased awareness of responsibility as an educator (90%)
e. Recognized need for curricular change (80%)
f. Sensed obligation to provide leadership for fostering appropriate curricular change (85%)
g. Recognized need for systematic judgments in curricular decision-making (75%)
h. Recognized need to create system-wide in-service programs to address areas of concern identified through systematic process (60%)

The team leaders perceived the project as being a positive experience for the data collectors (90%) and for the schools which were visited (80%)

Summary

The Northest Indiana Curriculum Evaluation Project which serves as the basis for this paper represented an attempt to systematically train 200 school personnel to collect accurate data for a cooperative curriculum evaluation project.

The data which was collected through participant observation and through a questionnaire administered to team leaders of data collecting task forces would indicate that the Kunkel-McElhinney model of curriculum evaluation can serve as an effective vehicle with which to collect data and accurately describe the facets of the teaching-learning situations of a given building. In addition, it was concluded that public school personnel can be trained as effective data collectors, that communication plays a vital role in determining the success or failure of a curriculum evaluation project, and that a cadre of professionals holding a propriatorial relationship to a project enhances the possibilities of its future curricular impact. The final conclusion was that an effective model for program evaluation and potential for future in-service rests in the two populations and their involvement in the evaluative process.